

Outbound Travelers Decline 9.3% in February —In Negative Territory Again after Increase in January

According to the estimate of outbound Japanese travelers released by the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) on March 21, the figure for February 2013 declined 9.3% year on year, to 1,427,000, turning growth negative once again following January's 2.5% increase. January displayed the first increase year on year in five months.

Outbound travelers in January and February this year amounted to only 2,791,000, a drop of 3.9% from the 2,903,731 travelers in the same period last year. Last year, the number of outbound travelers overall was up 8.8% year on year, reaching 1,849,000, which surpassed the 1.8 million mark for the first time and set a new record. This year in January as well, the figure year on year was positive, departing from the negative tone that had prevailed since the previous September. Thus, since a continued uptrend in outbound Japanese travelers was anticipated, the nearly double-digit decline in February was a disappointing result.

Meanwhile, the number of inbound foreigners in February amounted to 729,500, representing a sharp increase of 33.1% year on year. This reflects the fact that in Chinese-speaking countries and regions such as China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong which constitute a major share of Japan's inbound market, the Chinese New Year celebrated in January last year was celebrated in February this year.

On the other hand, looking at the total number of inbound foreign visitors in January and February, an increase of 13.4% year on year was posted totaling 1,398,200 persons, which indicates a promising start for the year in the number of inbound foreign visitors.

Japanese Overseas Travelers (Unit: Persons)			
Month	2012	2013	Change (%)
1 Jan.	1,331,144	1,364,000	2.5
2 Feb.	1,572,587	1,427,000	-9.3
3 Mar.	1,737,033		
4 Apr.	1,410,963		
5 May.	1,431,204		
6 Jun.	1,481,674		
1~6 Jan.-Jun.	8,964,605		
7 Jul.	1,598,016		
8 Aug.	1,964,041		
9 Sep.	1,622,996		
10 Oct.	1,470,289		
11 Nov.	1,434,503		
12 Dec.	1,436,172		
1~2 Jan.-Feb.	2,903,731	2,791,000	-3.9
1~12 Jan.-Dec.	18,490,622		

JAPAN NATIONAL TOURISM ORGANIZATION

The Theme is “The First Year of ‘Value Creation in the Travel Industry’” —FY2013 Business Plan for Realization of Japan as a Travel Destination

The Japan Association of Travel Agents (JATA) prepared its FY2013 Business Plan with the theme of “The First Year of ‘Value Creation in the Travel Industry’ -A Year of Progress toward Realization of Japan as a Travel Destination.” Topics put forward by the Special Policy Study Committee were also reflected in the plan for the fiscal year with the aim of further developing domestic travel, outbound travel, and inbound travel.

JATA's Board of Directors approved the FY2013 Business Plan at a meeting held on March 15. A report on the Business Plan will be presented at the general meeting to be held in June. While the FY2013 Business Plan incorporates short-term topics from among those put forward by the Special Policy Study Committee set up last June, it does not focus only on a single year but also takes the medium to long term into consideration.

Given the basic theme of “The First Year of ‘Value Creation in the Travel Industry’ A Year of Progress toward Realization of Japan as a Travel Destination,” the plan sets forth a basic policy composed of six points, including “pursuit of further development of demand in domestic, outbound, and inbound travel and reinvigoration of the industry,” promotion of “activities to boost the social status of the travel industry and to secure stable profits,” and pursuit of “expanded volume and quality improvement, with the highest priority placed on securing and promotion of safe and secure travel.”

In keeping with this basic policy, the following five tasks are designated: (1) creation of new value by travel agencies, (2) initiatives to create new demand for travel, (3) stabilization of travel agencies' management foundation, (4) initiatives for promotion of compliance and risk management operations, and (5) strengthening of public relations activities.

For “creation of new value,” JATA will strengthen the ability to offer value in travel, such as by boosting tourism development capabilities through enhancement of training and seminars, so that travel agencies themselves can create attractive trips rather than relying solely on the destinations for that. Moreover, JATA plan to promote initiatives in domestic, outbound, and inbound travel by means such as popularizing destination-based trips with the expansion of overnight trips, promoting local development, and boosting the quality of inbound trips through establishing a quality assurance system and a tour operator registration system.

At the same time, for “creation of new travel demand,” JATA will address the promotion of two-way tourism in collaboration with tourism bureaus and related bodies in bilateral efforts. In addition, JATA will develop activities not only in the overseas travel sector such as Team Europe, Japan-US Tourism Exchange Year, and the 40th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation, but also in the domestic travel sector by setting up new travel businesses focused on local areas, popularizing destination-based trips, and expanding overnight trips.

JATA will also continue to study long-term issues with an eye toward 2015, including “establishment of a travel industry business model for offering a new travel style and values,” “promotion of local development through travel, such as creation of attractions in sightseeing areas,” and “promotion of acquisition of vacation time by Japanese people.”